

How to Deal with Difficult Customers

Always keep in mind that people are different, not difficult

Peter Urs Bender - From Workopolis.com
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Your best customer loves fishing. As an incentive gift, he would love some fresh, thick, juicy garden worms from your backyard. Would you go and dig them for him?

Whenever we buy a gift for someone, we're buying something we like too. We justify it by saying we're getting something we think they'd like. But supposing topaz is that person's favorite color, and we hate topaz.

Chances we'll buy something in topaz are nil. That's because it's very difficult to see things through someone else's eyes.

Yet that's what's required to handle difficult customers. You must see things through their eyes, feel through their heart, smell through their nose, touch through their fingers. In other words, you must walk in their shoes. And that is very easily said, but difficult to do.

Lots of us were trained to handle difficult customers the way we would like to be handled. The Golden Rule says, "Do unto others as you would be done by." But think about that. The emphasis is on "you." How would "you" like to be treated?

The rule should be, "Do unto others as **they** would be done by." That makes us think about others. Not about ourselves. It's tough, but not impossible to shift our viewpoint for a short time.

Today we know a lot more about basic human personality types than we ever did before. We also know how each personality type needs to be dealt with. Only by doing this will they feel they have been treated sympathetically and properly.

The process starts with "listening" your customer out.

Don't say a word. Listen, listen, listen. Reflecting verbal expressions of sympathy and understanding is very helpful. But use it only to demonstrate you're actively listening. Don't make any statements before your customer has run his or her course. That could take some time. For you it might feel like forever... But let it happen. Your customer will feel better for it.

While you're listening, though, you can analyze your customer. There are only four basic personality types, although some analysts suggest as many as twelve and more, counting sub-types.

The most often used are: Analytical, Driver, Amiable and Expressive. Other experts use other names, including those of colors, animals, and even numbers.

To deal with difficult people you must identify which type they are, then deal with each individual as he or she would be done by. To do this properly, you should determine your own personality type. It will determine your own actions. Visit my website at: <http://www.peterursbender.com/quiz/index.html> and click on Complimentary Test to take the free Personality Test.

The **Analytical person** wants to know "how" things work. They value numbers, statistics and love details, fear losing face, tend to be introverted. In a problem situation, the Analytical wants exact answers. Written material. No emotional stories.

The **Driver**, as you might expect, wants to know "what". They want to save time, value results, love being in control, doing things their own way, fear giving up control, are extroverted and show little or no emotion. In a problem situation, the Driver wants results. Tell him/her exactly what you will do. Then do it !

The **Amiable person** want to know "why". They want to build relationships, love to give others support and attention, and value suggestions from others, fear disagreement. They display lots of emotion. In a problem situation, the Amiable would like reassurance, reassurance, reassurance that the problem will be fixed.

The **Expressive** wants to know "who". They value appreciation and a pat on the back, love social situations and parties, like to inspire others, fear being rejected, and are extroverted, readily showing emotion to others. In a problem situation, the Expressive wants you to understand him/her.

Let's take a few examples.

You're an Expressive. Your customer is an Analytical.

As an Expressive you really want to understand your customer as a person. You like to get enthusiastic about things. But that's the wrong approach. Be as systematic, thorough, deliberate and precise as you can in your approach. Provide analysis and facts. Don't get too personal. Don't rush, and prepare to repeat yourself on specific points. Use as much evidence as you can. The Analytical will truly appreciate your ability to stick to the point, provide the details, and focus on results.

You are an Amiable. You are faced with a Driver.

Instant conflict? Not necessarily. It depends on how successfully you have understood the Personality Types. For instance, in one of my seminars, a middle-manager described a "very difficult" client. She had a hard-driving "I want it done my way" approach. His colleagues laughed when they learned he had been assigned to this tough account, knowing what lay ahead for him.

Surprisingly, however, he was very successful at working with her. When asked why, he said, "I dealt with her in the manner I thought she wanted or needed. It worked. She realized I could see her perspective."

Here are some tips for your own personality type when dealing with those "different" others.

Analyticals should speak and smile more. Show appreciation and personal interest. Relax. Share information and be more open to others. Remember, enthusiasm won't kill you.

Drivers must slow down with "slow" people. Take more time to listen. Try to hold back from dominating and learn when to relinquish some control. Show more patience, and act more relaxed.

Amiables need to speed up when they talk with "fast" people. Talk more, listen less. Take control occasionally. Be assertive. Take some risks.

Expressives should listen more, slow down. Write things down. Set specific goals. Check details and remember to stay calm. Learn to "focus".

In dealing with anyone, especially in difficult situations, it pays to remember that people are different not difficult. It takes a lot of guts to change one's own behavioral pattern. But it always will pay off.

Peter Urs Bender is an international Executive Management Consultant. He lives and works out of Toronto. He is also the author of four best-selling business books: Leadership From Within, Secrets of Power Presentations, Secrets of Power Marketing and Secrets of Face-to-Face Communication. His latest book is Gutfeeling. He can be reached at 416-491-6690, or www.PeterUrsBender.com.

Peter Urs Bender's Guide to How Personality Theorists Have Described the Four Most Common Personality Types (Correlations are approximate)				
David W. Merrill and Roger H. Reid, <i>Personal Styles and Effective Performance</i>	Analytical	Amiable	Driver	Expressive
Hippocrates/Galen (Medieval Four Temperaments)	Melancholic	Phlegmatic	Choleric	Sanguine
Tim LaHaye/Littauer	Perfect Melancholic	Peaceful Phlegmatic	Powerful Choleric	Popular Sanguine
Carl G. Jung	Thinker	Feeler	Director	Intuitior
Myers-Briggs	Introvert/Thinker	Introvert/Feeler	Extrovert/Thinker	Extrovert/Feeler
Peter F. Drucker	Thought Man	People Man	Action Man	Front Man
The Stuart Atkins LIFO System	Conserving- Holding	Supporting- Giving	Controlling- Taking	Adapting- Dealing
DISC	Compliance	Steadiness	Dominance	Influencing
Robert E. Lefton	Submissive- Hostile	Submissive- Warm	Dominant- Hostile	Dominant- Warm
True Colors(TM)	Gold	Blue	Green	Orange
Bird Symbols	Owl	Dove	Eagle	Peacock
Animal Symbols	Beaver	Golden Retriever	Lion	Otter
Other well-known expressions	Processor Cognitive Logistical Compliance	Helper Interpersonal Supporter Submission	Boss Behavioural Commander Dominance	Impulsive Affective Socializer Inducement